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TAGS: [PROP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CN](#)
SUBJECT: "UNHAPPY CHINA": NATIONALISTIC RUBBISH OR CLARION
CALL TO PRIDEFUL YOUTH?

REF: A. BEIJING 303
[1](#)B. BEIJING 1249
[1](#)C. 08 BEIJING 3546

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor
Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The book "Unhappy China," a nationalistic rant against the United States and China's own supposedly West-worshipping elite, sold briskly in China following its release in March, but sales appear to have tapered off. China's official media have been largely critical of the book. Only a "small minority" of Chinese citizens subscribes to the authors' nationalism and anti-Americanism, numerous contacts have told PolOffs. The book's radicalism was largely a "ploy" to boost sales, but will not sway a sophisticated and internationally oriented Chinese public, many contacts said. America's image has improved significantly, including among recent university graduates, thanks to President Bush's attendance at the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony and the election of President Obama. While most Embassy interlocutors downplayed the idea that "Unhappy China" enjoyed high-level Party support, two pro-democracy scholars theorized that "leftist" leaders find the work "useful" for nudging the Chinese public away from Western economic and political models. The only contact who warned us that nationalism was on the rise was one of the book's authors, Wang Xiaodong. Young, educated urban Chinese are "extremely nationalistic," and the government is wary of them, Wang told PolOff. End Summary.

UNHAPPY CHINA, HAPPY PUBLISHER

[1](#)2. (SBU) The book "Unhappy China" (Zhongguo Bu Gaoxing) has been billed as a follow-on to the 1996 book "China Can Say No." Song Qiang, one of the five authors of Unhappy China, contributed to the 1996 volume. After its release in China on March 12, "Unhappy China" hit the best-sellers list with over 600,000 copies sold the first month, according to dangdang.com (one of China's most popular online bookstores). An April 13 report in China Newsweek (Zhongguo Xinwen Zhoukan) put the book's first month's sales at a more modest 470,000, though the story notes this was enough to net each of the book's five authors RMB 1.4 million (USD 206,000) in royalties. Two months after its release, however, sales have apparently fallen substantially. As of May 11, the book failed to register in the top 100 best-sellers on amazon.cn.

PRC MEDIA LARGELY CRITICAL

13. (SBU) China's English-language media have mostly panned the book. On March 25, the Xinhua News Agency's English-language service issued a report stating the book had "failed to strike a chord among average Chinese" and was selling "poorly" at Beijing bookstores. Chinese-language media, while still critical of the book's tone, have been less dismissive of its impact. The China Youth Daily (CYD), the paper of the Communist Youth League, published a scathing essay on April 8 that was widely reprinted on the Internet. The CYD piece drew the distinction between "healthy nationalism," such as that championed by Sun Yat-sen or Gandhi, to the "narcissistic" (zilian) and "bellicose" (haozhan) nationalism espoused by the Unhappy China authors, who brag about China's cultural superiority and the need for China to take over the United States' role as world leader. A March 30 Xinhua story headlined "Unhappy China Shakes the West" noted the great attention the book had received abroad. Though the Xinhua article quoted Chinese scholars who denounced the book's extremist rhetoric, it also devoted substantial space to the authors' defense of their work. People's Daily, the mouthpiece of the Communist Party Central Committee, has largely ignored Unhappy China, although on April 8 the paper quoted a scholar as saying that while the views in the book were irrational, China should allow different voices to be heard. At least one

BEIJING 00001378 002 OF 004

paper, the Beijing Evening News (Beijing Wanbao), which is published by the Beijing Municipal Party Committee, has defended Unhappy China. On April 10 the paper ran a blistering editorial accusing Hong Kong's Phoenix Television of pro-Western bias because many of the station's guests and commentators had denounced the book.

INTERNET REACTION LESS HOSTILE

14. (SBU) Though Unhappy China has met with mostly harsh reviews in the mainstream media, Internet reaction has been more favorable. An on-line opinion poll conducted by the web portal Sina.com showed that 70 percent of the survey's 19,000 participants believed Unhappy China discussed important domestic and international issues and problems "worthy of deep thought." Twenty-one percent described the book as "too extreme" and "opportunistic."

FRINGE APPEAL ONLY

15. (C) Beijing-based contacts universally criticized the book in discussions with PolOffs. Most described it as representing only a "small fringe" of Chinese society and urged the USG not to pay too much attention to the tome's anti-Americanism. Some journalist contacts (ref B) saw the book as a "joke" whose radical tone was meant to shock and sell books. XXXXXXXXXXXX said XXXXXXXXXXXX that his first complaint about the book was the poor quality of the writing. To produce the book, XXXXXXXXXXXX said, the authors merely recorded a series of conversations that were then edited into essays. XXXXXXXXXXXX said even a bad review by the Economic Observer would have given the book more publicity than it deserved, so his paper had ignored the book altogether. XXXXXXXXXXXX), told PolOff XXXXXXXXXXXX that Unhappy China did not represent mainstream views.

The Chinese public was now much more globalized and had a better understanding of the world than was the case in 1996, when "China Can Say No" hit the shelves. Unhappy China, XXXXXXXXXXXX argued, thus did not have the same traction as the earlier book. Nevertheless, in a nod to the high level of public interest, the Beijing News had devoted a full page to Unhappy China in its March 28 edition, including an interview with author Wang Xiaodong and critical commentary by a scholar.

UNITED STATES' IMAGE ON THE RISE

16. (C) In a conversation with PolOff XXXXXXXXXXXX, XXXXXXXXXXXX, likewise said Unhappy China represented a minority view and that, at most, "20 percent" of the Chinese public subscribed to the kind of nationalism espoused by the authors XXXXXXXXXXXX said Unhappy China was mainly a "commercial exercise," with the book's extremism merely a "ploy" to boost sales. Nevertheless, XXXXXXXXXXXX said, the book did appeal to "less educated Chinese." XXXXXXXXXXXX said the book had not received support from any individual or faction within the CCP leadership. The book also did not reflect an overall rise in nationalism or anti-Americanism in China. The image of the United States, XXXXXXXXXXXX said, was actually quite good thanks to President Bush's attendance at the Beijing Olympics opening ceremony and the generally warm feeling Chinese have toward President Obama.

17. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX, echoed XXXXXXXXXXXX's analysis, saying that the United States' image on college campuses had improved since the election of President Obama. XXXXXXXXXXXX said Unhappy China tapped into the "natural pride" young Chinese felt at their country's growing power, which seemed even more evident since the global financial crisis threw most Western economies into recession. When the United States was booming economically, XXXXXXXXXXXX argued, many Americans

BEIJING 00001378 003 OF 004

showed the same air of superiority and sense of power that the authors of Unhappy China now displayed.

A TOOL OF LEFTISTS?

18. (C) In contrast, XXXXXXXXXXXX, and XXXXXXXXXXXX saw greater political significance in Unhappy China. XXXXXXXXXXXX. XXXXXXXXXXXX said that given China's tight censorship, such a book could not have been published without support from high-level leaders, possibly including President Hu Jintao himself. XXXXXXXXXXXX said that most of the criticism of Unhappy China had come from urban professionals, but the book did resonate with the wider population. Nationalism, according to XXXXXXXXXXXX, remained a potent force in China even though society as a whole was becoming more mature. XXXXXXXXXXXX believed that left-leaning members of the leadership did not necessarily like or agree with the contents of the book, particularly its foreign policy prescriptions, but saw it as "useful" for pushing the public more to the left and reducing popular support in general for Western economic and political models. Hu Jintao, XXXXXXXXXXXX argued, was not necessarily pushing the book but, due to his background, tended to accept "leftist" ideas as

"normal."

WANG XIAODONG SPEAKS

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AUTHORS' PRO-DEMOCRACY VIEWS CENSORED

¶11. (C) Wang repeatedly asserted that nationalists were supportive of democracy and human rights. When sovereignty issues were not involved, ordinary Chinese were not opposed to outside criticism and agreed that human rights should be improved. "Only

BEIJING 00001378 004 OF 004

the Chinese central government is irritated with foreign criticism of China's human rights situation." Wang described himself as a "pro-reform intellectual," saying his contributions to the book "clearly" stated his support for "democracy." Censors, however, deleted most passages in the original draft regarding democracy or involving criticism of Chairman Mao Zedong, Wang claimed. Even so, Wang said, overall he had been surprised at how much the censors let through. (Note: Song Qiang, in an interview with Xinhua, also noted that parts of Unhappy China dealing with domestic politics were cut in order to ensure publication.)

¶12. (C) In person as in his writing, Wang seemed especially incensed at the behavior of "so-called liberals" in China who, he asserted, were really "reverse racists." These liberals, Wang said, point to the Cultural Revolution as proof that Chinese people were inherently mean and wallowed in a self-loathing view of China's inferiority compared to the West. Far from secretly supporting the book, Wang asserted, China's government had a "hostile reaction" to Unhappy China, and the CCP Propaganda Department had ordered official media to criticize it. The book, he added, was also "very unpopular at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs." Despite the hostility of the central government, Wang claimed, the book was selling well, especially among military officers, local government cadres, and young people.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) The high sales of Unhappy China show that there is a reservoir of nationalistic sentiment in China, even though it may not be as large as Wang Xiaodong describes. Some of this can be attributed to China's education system, which continues to stress the "bullying" and "humiliation" China endured at the hands of Western powers in centuries past. That the CCP's Propaganda Department encouraged negative press coverage of the book indicates the Party remains wary of nationalism getting out of hand. Nationalists, as Wang argued, do not necessarily support the Party. However, most of our contacts believe that Chinese society has, thanks to increasing contact with the outside world, undergone change over the last decade that is causing nationalism to give way to a more positive sense of national pride. According to these contacts, the Chinese who warmly welcomed U.S. women's volleyball coach Lang Ping at the 2008 Olympics (despite the fact that she previously played and coached for China -- see ref C) now greatly outnumber "unhappy" nationalists.

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